

DURRANT INNOCENT.

PAYS THE PENALTY OF ANOTHER MAN'S CRIME.

REV. MR. GIBSON THE MURDERER

Of Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams.---A History of the Case.

The following appears in a California paper:

"One of the saddest and most atrocious legal murders so far recorded is that of Theodore Durrant, who was hanged in California a few years since, for the murder of Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams, a most diabolical double crime, its very fiendishness hardly having a parallel in the annals of vice, and its perpetrator was sought high and low for several days, the whole world hoping for his capture and punishment. In the meantime the so-called astute detectives and police authorities concluded a victim was needed, and after fastening their clutches on young Durrant proceeded to collect what they termed evidence, the whole mass of stuff in all probability being manufactured for the purpose of conviction and all of a circumstantial nature. Durrant stoutly maintained from his arrest up to the moment of his execution that he was innocent of the horrible charge, but forsooth because he could not explain every moment of his presence at certain times, he was convicted and hanged, and once more the majesty of law, along with the thick-skulled theory of these police wisecracks, was duly vindicated. Now the true sequel: A few days ago, on his deathbed, Rev. Mr. Gibson, who at the time was pastor of Emmanuel church, where one of the murders was committed, confessed that he killed both of the victims. He was an active and important witness at the trial of poor Durrant, the reason of which is now quite plain, and also in view of the fact that suspicion was strongly directed to him at the time."

Theodore Durrant was hanged at San Quentin prison, Cal., on Jan. 7, 1898.

HISTORY OF THE CASE.

The following history of the crime for which Durrant was hanged and his trial was telegraphed from San Quentin on the day of Durrant's execution:

SAN FRANCISCO, Cal., Jan. 7.—William Henry Theodore Durrant, who was hanged at the state prison at San Quentin today, gave his life in exchange for the lives of two young women, who were members of the church to which he belonged. While Durrant was convicted of but one murder under the law he was responsible by public opinion for the murder of both Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams and it is felt that his death expiates one crime as well as the other.

Durrant's crimes were peculiar in their atrocity from any point of view. He was reared in a Christian home and until the time of his way through a medical college. The only characteristic that seemed marked in his nature was piety. He had been a prominent member of the Emmanuel Baptist church for several years and for a year previous to his arrest he had been assistant superintendent of the Sunday School. In this capacity he made the acquaintance of Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams, both of whom were destined to be murdered by him in the church where they worshipped together. Blanche Lamont disappeared on April 3, 1895, and was never seen alive

afterwards. She left the home of her aunt, Mrs. C. G. Noble, on that day to go to school and for ten days no trace of her could be found. Many members of Emmanuel church assisted in the search and among others was Theodore Durrant, who had often acted as Miss Lamont's escort. He was seemingly greatly distressed on account of Miss Lamont's disappearance and at length expressed the belief that she had joined the ranks of fallen women. This theory seemed plausible to the police and a search was made among the places where it was believed that the missing girl might be found. Durrant assisted in the enquiry which came to naught. Ten days had passed since Miss Lamont disappeared and her friends had almost given up hope of ever knowing her fate when a discovery was made which led to the finding of Miss Lamont's body.

The ladies of Emmanuel church were engaged in decorating the edifice preparatory to the celebration of the Easter Sunday service when the mangled body of Minnie Williams was found in the library. A number of ugly wounds and some rags which had been forced down the young woman's throat told of the unequal struggle she had made to protect her life. Miss Williams' body was discovered in the afternoon and late the same night the first clue to the murderer was obtained. From some of the young woman's friends it was learned that she had been seen the evening before with Durrant and although there was nothing else to show that he had any connection with the crime, the police decided to arrest him. Durrant's home was visited late at night but he was not there. His parents said that he had left shortly before midnight with the signal corps of the National Guards, to which he belonged, to make some heliographing experiments at Mount Diablo. The next train carried two detectives toward the mountain and after completing their journey by stage, Durrant was found late in the afternoon and arrested. While these events were taking place on Mount Diablo, 60 miles away, a discovery had been made in this city which filled the streets with men and women crying for vengeance. From the first the police associated the finding of Miss Williams' body with the disappearance of Miss Lamont and a search was at once begun in the church for her body. Men worked all night tearing up floors and breaking down partitions and at 10 o'clock Sunday morning the body of Miss Lamont was found. A broken door knob and a turned bolt excited the suspicions of the searchers and the door leading to the belfrey of the church was broken down. Up the winding stairs the policemen grouped their way and at the third landing, lying in the corner of the darkened belfrey, the body of the murdered girl was found. No knife had been used to commit the crime, as was the case in the murder of Miss Williams, but the imprint of five fingers buried in her throat revealed the manner in which the young woman had met her death.

The trial which began on July 22 and lasted until Nov. 1 was one

of the most celebrated in criminal jurisprudence. Nearly 1,200 talesmen were examined before a jury was secured and six weeks passed before the taking of testimony was begun. The evidence throughout was circumstantial, but when taken together formed a chain so strong as to permit of no reasonable doubt. The case was submitted to the jury on the afternoon of Nov. 1, 1895, after having been on trial over three months. Twenty minutes after they left the court room the jurors returned and rendered a verdict of guilty in the first degree. Judge Murphy a few days later sentenced Durrant to be hanged on Feb. 1, 1896. Then began the fight for delay, vigorously maintained for almost three years, not even ceasing with the execution of the death sentence.

The theory of the prosecution has always been that Durrant murdered Miss Williams to conceal the murder of Miss Lamont. The two young women were acquaintances and Durrant suspected that Miss Williams believed that he knew something about the disappearance of Miss Lamont.

NIGHT BEFORE EXECUTION. The night before Durrant's execution the Supreme Court denied an application for a writ of habeas corpus in the case.

As stated in the item from the California paper, Durrant maintained his innocence to the last.

At his request a reporter of the Associated Press interviewed him the night before his execution. His mother was present.

"How do you feel?" was asked. "Hopeful, buoyant, and ready to meet my Maker," was the reply. "I know the Lord is with me. No one knows what faith is until tried. I am going to a Judge who has never committed a wrong and who cannot. My faith is so strong that I have kept up and will be sustained to the end."

Then turning to his mother he said: "Mother, I have come to the conclusion that it needs trial to know God. And you may say that to the world," he added.

"What will you say at the last?" he was asked.

"I shall proclaim my innocence loudly, strenuously," answered Durrant. "Make this as strong as you please. I will not falter at the end. I will die bravely, knowing I am going to a better world. I thank God my hands are clean, not stained with blood; but the fair name of California will stand stained with a crime that can never be wiped out, the blood of an innocent man."

BRAVE TO THE LAST.

It was feared that Durrant would commit suicide and the prison guards were most vigilant. But Durrant had no thought of suicide. He passed his waking hours in prayer and when the night before his execution the jail physician remarked reassuringly that he would visit Durrant in the morning prepared to give him stimulants Durrant's smile and easy increased tone told if he had not said a word that he would scorn such support or comfort.

So impressed was the penitent-

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often develop into weak, delicate, backward children; undersized, nervous, feeble, adults. Lack of nourishment is the cause.

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ary doctor with the attitude of Durrant that he declared: Why that fellow is the man of the century."

The day of his execution Durrant awoke at 6.15 a.m., after sleeping from one o'clock. He was not given a collar or necktie as they would have to be removed when the noose was placed around his neck. Durrant noticed the omission and at his request the missing articles of attire were sent to him.

"You never saw a braver man, said the jail governor. He is calmer than you or I, not the least bit nervous. There is no danger that he will weaken. He has nerve and is determined to die bravely."

With his feet on the gallows, the rope about his neck and the hangman turning to get the black cap, Durrant whispered a request to be allowed to speak and it was granted. In his speech he protested his innocence, declaring he was not guilty of the crime.

Durrant, who was a protestant, on the morning of the day he was executed declined to see two Protestant clergymen who had previously visited him. Later he accepted the Catholic faith and in the death chamber Rev. Father Logan gave him the extreme unction and the Catholic service was performed.

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"Gib me a dime," ejaculated a squaw as she poked her head into the Advocate's sanctum.

"Comment ce va," replied the scribe. "Yup, a dime." "Le papier." "A dime, a dime."

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"He not understand," remarked the squaw as she took the paper and departed.

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